

An Interview with Ira and Mary Lou Fulton on Jan 30, 2004

Mary Lou: Hello. I'm Mary Lou Fulton. For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed the world of the arts and I would have loved studying theatre and film at BYU. The Mary Lou Fulton Chair in Theatre and Media Arts will help raise the standard of entertainment throughout the world, one student at a time. I hope we can all encourage and support young people as they explore ways to bless and inspire others through the arts.

Interviewer: I want to know how you and your husband met.

Mary Lou.: Oh my goodness! You really do? When we met, he was working at the newspaper and he was assigned to be the lifeguard at the Republican Gazette's pool. My father had worked there for 42 years, and I was excited for this to happen. He came to the party to celebrate the announcement that there was going to be a recreation center for all the employees of the Republican Gazette. That was one of the biggest things going on in Phoenix, Arizona, at the time. I, of course, went to the party with my two cousins and he came in with a friend. I thought he was the loudest guy that had the nerve to walk in there—I didn't realize he worked the newspaper and then they named him the new lifeguard for the pool. I saw him there, and my two cousins thought he was just great and they wanted me to meet him. Betty Lou, a friend of his, actually said, "You've got to meet this Ira Fulton." I'd heard it from my cousins and then my friend at ASU, "You have got to meet this Ira Fulton." I thought, who is this Ira Fulton?

One day I came out of the library and Bailey was with me and Ira was talking to a bunch of football players in a circle. Bailey says come on, I want to take you over here and introduce you to Ira. I told her, I wasn't going over there because they were all talking. Anyways, I went over and he said hi. I said hello and just left thinking he didn't think so much of me. I mean, I didn't expect him too but he was just kind of noisy. My mother thought he was noisy too – He slammed the screen door. The first time he came down to take me out, he called and we had a date. I really did fall in love with him because—and it had nothing to do with that red convertible—he had this big smile and was always so up. Oh my goodness! I thought, because I knew he played football, those were false teeth because they were just too perfect.

I had my cousin Bill—if you read my book, you know it's in there—give Ira a licorice and I told him to pull real hard and if they're not real they'll come out. The next day he called and said they're real. That's how I met him, through those crazy things that happened: meeting at the college on the campus and then he worked at the newspaper, everyone worked at the newspaper—my cousin, his dad worked there too, they were all watching Ira who wore a different shirt every day.

It was just fun to keep track of him and so many people wanting me to meet this guy. When I finally did, I did fall in love with him. He had big, strong arms, he was very tan. I think about it and I get goose bumps still because he was such a wonderful man for me. When he hugged, it was like a great big, strong, teddy bear; I just melted in his arms. After a couple of times he was

probably my most favorite boyfriend I ever had and so I decided I'd marry him. I got caught up in that. I think of those wonderful days and I get all caught up, they were wonderful.

Interviewer: That's where we find our students now, in that same phase of life. We were talking earlier about your feeling about where the arts are now. What do you think can happen and what is happening to make it more positive?

Mary Lou: The most positive thing is that the students are here at BYU and they're learning their crafts so well. They're in such wonderful company and they have the opportunity today to put something out there that isn't so degrading to people and it's done with care and love and thought and understanding. I think when these students leave BYU, they will do something for the world that it hungers for, even for those that put out the bad stuff. I think that the heart – the soul—feels the beauty that comes from the students that have this in their makeup, in what they do.

I know that we're turning a big corner here. I know that when these students leave this university and go into the world, with what they have to offer, I could almost promise them it's going to be accepted beautifully because it's an innate feeling that people have in their spirit when something's good. You know, so much for all this hoopla and all this bad stuff that's out there, it's really just garbage and we need to stay away from it. When the world sees this fresh and beautiful talent come forth and put it on the screen, it's going to be wonderful. I don't know where to go from there. I could almost promise them that it's going to make a big difference in the world today.

Interviewer: Ira, if you could speak to the students as someone who's had the life experiences you've had as a husband, as a father, as a professional what are some of the encouragements and cautions you might offer a student?

Ira: When I visit BYU and I look at the campus and the students as a whole, and I look at theatre arts because of the people involved in it, and how my wife loves it, I think that we're going to get quality types of movies and quality students out of here to set examples to the world so people can see what the difference is. When I visit other universities, I see the same boys and girls but they're different. I have a state university and I have a church university and my church university is as different as night and day when I look at the moral standards of the boys and girls at BYU. And my heart goes out when I think what's going to come out of here with the quality of stuff that I see here, in the future it really sets the example.

Interviewer: Some of our students, even at this young age, have families and marry young in the church. How can they balance their family life with their pursuit of a profession?

Ira: Well, a profession is what brings in the money. Family is what gets you to heaven. And there's a lot of difference between your work profession and your family position. I always tell

people who work for me there is life after work. I say if you don't take care of your family obligations, then you are not going to be able to perform well for me.

Mary Lou: He always says family comes first and it's a wonderful standard that he really portrays in his businesses and I think it's so important. These young people, they have to balance the family and the arts. The world needs the arts. They need the theatre. This makes a well-rounded person. Heaven forbid if we were all engineers—excuse me—but truly we need to have the beauty, the music, the theatre to make us a well-rounded person. It makes life so beautiful.

Ira: And my sweetheart for fifty years has been trying to get this idea into me about slowing down.

Mary Lou: I love for him to go out and look at the moon and he won't move. I say come and look at the sunset. I've got him looking at the sunset; I've got him loving birds now. Before we're gone, I think he's even going to see some more theatre with me.

Ira: I might even smell the roses.

Mary Lou: He used to plant my roses for me but he likes to get the work done, the hard work; he's just a man all the way through. But he really does like good music.

Ira: Everybody always asks me, they say, why do you work so hard? I say because my wife makes me. She really doesn't. She's my support mechanism, she's my sweetheart, and I just know that I want the best for her, and I want the best for my grandchildren and my brothers and sisters and all that. I love work because of the end result; the end result is that you are able to help people to help themselves. I don't believe in just giving a handout. I want to see results. No more than here at Brigham Young University, though I support the theatre arts, as long as I see that there is a good return on my investment. And an investment is the result of what students are going to be able to accomplish during their tenure at this great university.

But again, when you say family, if you support the family in business and ensure everything else, everything is strong. The community is strong, your business is strong, your church is strong, your neighborhood is strong because that's what makes up this great world we live in, our family. The other thing we do is to support our family, and to give our families a little extra in this world. But you've got to have a great feeling towards family.

I feel that I can't do enough for my employees. I want them to have the best insurance, I want them to have the best savings program, I want them to be able to go home and take care of their families. I would never let a person work for me five minutes if they are negligent to their family. I'd just send them home. If I have people telling me they're having trouble at home, I say go home and stay there until everything is straightened out and then come back to work. They say, well, I can't afford that. I say, yes you can afford it, I can afford it, you don't need to worry about your finances. Get your family problems straightened up and then come back.

Because I know they'll come back twice as strong. I get more return on my investment in a situation like that real fast because I'm doing what's right. I'm supporting the right cause.

Mary Lou: I want to get back to the music and the theater. You got him on business and lost me. I'm excited. We're going to have a home here. I'm going to be able to go to some beautiful, beautiful plays and theatre arts things. I love the art museum, I love the people that run it, I love the films and the videos—I love the Lemmings! I like to see excellence come out of these. Think about the world out there. This is a big world, and we're going to make a big impression, from this school, in the middle of the United States—you wait and see. We may not be there right now, but it's going to happen. These students are going to make a difference and we're so lucky to be here and to be part of it

Interviewer: Mary Lou, regarding the chair, if we have students that go on (and I think this chair will give them that opportunity in the future), what kind of obligation do you think they have to give back, like you're giving back and what kind of charge would you give to these students?

Mary Lou: Excellence is its own reward. When they do well, and they center their lives, their work and their arts in Christ, they are going to be rewarded; it's its own reward. They don't have to answer to us at all; they have to answer to themselves. They are going to do a great job and excellence is its own reward. I truly believe that.

Interviewer: What about the responsibility to others?

Mary Lou: Well I think they're going to get there and I think they're going to get that. I think you will receive the blessings that help you become a better person. The better you become in your art, the better person you become, the more experience you have. They have families. They are going to get good experiences and their responsibility to their families should be number one in their lives. I hope whoever they work for feels like Ira does: that their family comes first. That's the most important thing of all and then they're on their way with their arts. I have a granddaughter in the arts; she plays, she sings, she's wonderful. She hasn't started her family yet. So I keep on her for that and want her to start her family. Two together may dance beautifully together. It's a good combination. How wonderful for the young children to have a mother that can play them to sleep like my mother did. There is nothing better to ask.

Interviewer: You know success can be very seductive thing sometimes. Sometimes students find themselves with some success and they get a little dazzled by it. How would you advise that they avoid that kind of seduction if they experience that kind of success or economical fame? How do they keep things in perspective?

Ira: That's always hard because you see people all the time getting successful and forgetting where it came from. I know where my success came from. I know that what I have was preordained; I know that my blessings and my talents came to me from my Heavenly Father and I don't forget that. I know. Everybody always says I made this kind of money on my own but I

did not, I had a lot of help. I made a promise when I was real young that if I was successful—because in those days I was poor so it was easy to make these promises—that I wouldn't be greedy. I just never let money be anything but a tool. In all my life, money is just a tool to make things happen.

Mary Lou: If these young people feel like they've done it all on their own, they need someone to talk to them because they're not getting there on their own. The better they become, the more they owe the Lord, the more they need to give gratitude because they should know where it comes from. They should know that excellence isn't just their hard work, it's because they're being blessed because they are doing what is right.

Do what is right, let the consequences follow. I can sing a song for almost every little trivia piece you come up with but it's true. If they really, really get good in what they are doing and they remember why they got good and from where it comes, they won't get off base. I pray for them. I pray for the children today because this world is getting rougher and rougher all the time. They've got to work hard to stay with the Spirit, and always ask for the Spirit to be with them and they are going to do well.

I have a lot faith especially here, because we are involved in two different colleges, and we see here they have something more. They have the Spirit and the Holy Ghost to guide them and they need to use it, they need to be aware of it. They want to do excellent work and do well for the person who gave them the opportunity to do it. That's not us, that is the Lord—He gives them their talents and they need to be grateful for that.